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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 001494

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: BOUCHER MEETING WITH LEADERS OF PAKISTAN MUSLIM  
LEAGUE

REF: ISLAMABAD 787

Classified By: Ambassador Anne W. Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During a March 28 meeting, Pakistan Muslim League President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain and General Secretary Mushahid Hussain told Assistant Secretary for South

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and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher that their party would now act as a "calm opposition." The party's only red lines would be an attempt to remove Musharraf from the presidency or to curtail his powers in that position. Shujaat predicted that rival Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz would fail to split Musharraf's party, and that Nawaz was "overplaying his hand" on the issues of ousting Musharraf and restoring the former Chief Justice. Both men believed Nawaz would abandon the coalition and try for early elections, but Shujaat cautioned that they did not want to see Nawaz in what would be a stronger position in the opposition. Uncomfortable that their former coalition partner, the Muttahida Quami Movement, had voted for Prime Minister Gillani, Shujaat nonetheless supported inclusion of the Movement in the Sindh provincial government "for the stability of Karachi." End summary.

¶2. (C) Assistant Secretary Boucher met March 28 with opposition Pakistan Muslim League leaders Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain and Mushahid Hussain. Both men expressed their appreciation for the high-level visit and hoped that the relationship between their party and Embassy would continue despite their party's "new position" in the National Assembly.

¶3. (C) Shujaat promised to lead a "calm opposition," which would take a firm stand on only a few key issues. He cited the full restoration of the deposed judiciary and any attempt to weaken the president's power to dissolve the National Assembly as such red line issues. He also asserted that the new GOP did not have the votes, specifically in the Senate, to impeach Musharraf.

¶4. (C) Shujaat noted that his party promised before the February 18 elections to work with the Pakistan Peoples' Party if either won a majority. Shujaat was disappointed that the People's Party had not reciprocated by including the Pakistan Muslim League in the coalition.

Nawaz is "overplaying his hand."

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15. (C) As for the better-than-expected result for Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, Mushahid said that the vote was more an anti-Musharraf vote than a vote for Nawaz Sharif's party. Even Nawaz,s party was surprised at the result. Mushahid said that Nawaz was now "overplaying his hand," claiming a mandate to force Musharraf from the presidency. Such a strident stance would doom the new coalition government, but neither Shujaat nor Mushahid would hazard a guess as to how long this Government would last. Shujaat predicted, however, that Nawaz would fail to split up Musharra,s party; his parliamentarians would stay loyal, Shujaat hoped.

16. (C) Mushahid argued that the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz was actually the weaker of the two Leagues because its platform was based on just two personalities: (1) Pervez Musharraf (and his removal from the presidency), and (2) Iftikhar Chaudhary (and his reinstatement as Supreme Court Chief Justice). The Pakistan Muslim League, in contrast, ran on issues, Mushahid asserted. "We've suffered from our own success," Mushahid added, referring to greater press freedoms. He predicted, "The Pakistan People,s Party is not prepared to deal with the press of today's Pakistan."

17. (C) Shujaat said he hoped the Muslim League-Nawaz would stay with the People,s Party as long as possible, though he bet Nawaz would soon push for another election and would eventually flip over to the opposition. "We don't want Nawaz in opposition," said Shujaat, "because it will make him stronger." And though seemingly perturbed by the Muttahida Quami Movement's attempt "to mix their drinks" -- sitting in opposition but voting for the People,s Party prime minister -- Shujaat advocated their inclusion in at least the Sindh provincial government "for the stability of Karachi." The

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Movement will still be "more with us than them."

18. (U) Assistant Secretary Boucher has cleared this message.  
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